

Remarks on Earthquake Relief Efforts in Haiti

January 14, 2010

Good morning, everybody. I've directed my administration to launch a swift, coordinated, and aggressive effort to save lives and support the recovery in Haiti. The losses that have been suffered in Haiti are nothing less than devastating, and responding to a disaster of this magnitude will require every element of our national capacity: our diplomacy and development assistance, the power of our military, and most importantly, the compassion of our country. And this morning I'm joined by several members of my national security team who are leading this coordinated response.

I've made it clear to each of these leaders that Haiti must be a top priority for their departments and agencies right now. This is one of those moments that calls out for American leadership. For the sake of our citizens who are in Haiti, for the sake of the Haitian people, who have suffered so much, and for the sake of our common humanity, we stand in solidarity with our neighbors to the south, knowing that, but for the grace of God, there we go.

This morning I can report that the first waves of our rescue and relief workers are on the ground and at work. A survey team worked overnight to identify priority areas for assistance and shared the results of that review throughout the United States Government and with international partners who are also sending support. Search and rescue teams are actively working to save lives. Our military has secured the airport and prepared it to receive the heavy equipment and resources that are on the way and to receive them around the clock, 24 hours a day. An airlift has been set up to deliver high-priority items like water and medicine. And we're coordinating closely with the Haitian Government, the United Nations, and other countries who are also on the ground.

Now, we have no higher priority than the safety of American citizens, and we've airlifted injured Americans out of Haiti. We're running additional evacuations and will continue to do so in the days ahead. I know that many Americans, especially Haitian Americans, are desperate for information about their family and friends, and the State Department has set up a phone number and e-mail address that you can find at www.state.gov—www.state.gov—to inquire about your loved ones. And you should know that we will not rest until we account for our fellow Americans in harm's way.

Even as we move as quickly as possible, it will take hours, and in many cases days, to get all of our people and resources on the ground. Right now in Haiti roads are impassable, the main port is badly damaged, communications are just beginning to come online, and aftershocks continue.

None of this will seem quick enough if you have a loved one who's trapped, if you're sleeping on the streets, if you can't feed your children. But it's important that everybody in Haiti understand, at this very moment one of the largest relief efforts in our recent history is moving towards Haiti. More American search and rescue teams are coming, more food, more water, doctors, nurses, paramedics, more of the people, equipment, and capabilities that can make the difference between life and death.

The United States Armed Forces are also on their way to support this effort. Several Coast Guard cutters are already there, providing everything from basic services like water to vital

technical support for this massive logistical operation. Elements of the Army's 82d Airborne Division will arrive today. We're also deploying a Marine expeditionary unit, the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson*, and the Navy's hospital ship, the *Comfort*.

And today I'm also announcing an immediate investment of \$100 million to support our relief efforts. This will mean more of the life-saving equipment, food, water, and medicine that will be needed. This investment will grow over the coming year as we embark on the long-term recovery from this unimaginable tragedy.

The United States of America will also forge the partnerships that this undertaking demands. We will partner with the Haitian people. And that includes the Government of Haiti, which needs our support as they recover from the devastation of this earthquake. It also includes the many Haitian Americans who are determined to help their friends and family. And I've asked Vice President Biden to meet in south Florida this weekend with members of the Haitian American community and with responders who are mobilizing to help the Haitian people.

Now, we will partner with the United Nations and its dedicated personnel and peacekeepers, especially those from Brazil, who are already on the ground due to their outstanding peacekeeping efforts there. And I want to say that our hearts go out to the United Nations, which has experienced one of the greatest losses in its history. We have no doubt that we can carry on the work that was done by so many of the U.N. effort that have been lost, and we see that their legacy is Haiti's hope for the future.

Now, we will partner with other nations and organizations. And that's why I've been reaching out to leaders from across the Americas and beyond who are sending resources to support this effort. And we will join with the strong network of nongovernmental organizations across the country who understand the daily struggles of the Haitian people.

Yet even as we bring our resources to bear on this emergency, we need to summon the tremendous generosity and compassion of the American people. I want to thank the many Americans who have already contributed to this effort. I want to encourage all Americans who want to help to go to whitehouse.gov to learn more. And in the days ahead, we will continue to work with those individuals and organizations who want to assist this effort so that you can do so.

Finally, I want to speak directly to the people of Haiti: Few in the world have endured the hardships that you have known. Long before this tragedy, daily life itself was often a bitter struggle. And after suffering so much for so long, to face this new horror must cause some to look up and ask, Have we somehow been forsaken?

To the people of Haiti, we say clearly and with conviction: You will not be forsaken; you will not be forgotten. In this, your hour of greatest need, America stands with you. The world stands with you. We know that you are a strong and resilient people. You have endured a history of slavery and struggle, of natural disaster and recovery. And through it all, your spirit has been unbroken and your faith has been unwavering. So today, you must know that help is arriving; much, much more help is on the way.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House.

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